

Sunday CITYUPDATE

MOVING FORWARD WITH WOMEN POWER



Ms Moni Pizani

PHOTOS: ROKIAH MAHMUD



Students who are taking part in the ISB BGIC

By Rokiah Mahmud

No country can afford to ignore the need to help women reach their full potential. Any country that chooses to place their women at a subservient position will be doing so at their own loss.

This observation was made by Datin Hajah Adina Othman, the Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth & Sports, during the opening of the ISB Borneo Global Issues Conference (BGIC) IX 2011 themed "Women In The 21st Century" yesterday.

The theme of this year's student-managed conference was selected in conjunction with the historic launch of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) on Jan 1, 2011.

In her keynote address, Datin Hajah Adina noted that ignoring the potential of women and their empowerment meant neglecting half of the potential of society in the advancement of peace, prosperity, democracy and development in any region in the world.

While gender issues have become increasingly the focus of international attention, gender inequalities continue to exist, the Deputy Minister said, adding that this threatens not only the well-being and dignity of millions of girls and women but seriously jeopardises efforts to bring about sustainable development and world peace.

According to Datin Hajah Adina, 70 per cent of the global population of the world's poor are women, making up two-thirds of the world's illiterate population.

They also earn only 10 per cent of the world's income and own one per cent of the world's property, she said, adding that one in three females has been physically or sexually abused. Furthermore, up to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders annually. Eighty per cent of them are women and girls, and the majority of them are forced into the sex trade.

The Millennium Declaration, which was agreed by 189 world leaders, includes gender equality and empowerment of women as one of its eight goals.

In Brunei Darussalam, Datin Hajah Adina pointed out that women have equal access as their male counterparts with regard to services and opportunities such as health, education, ownership of property, training, entrepreneurship and employment.

"Raising the dignity of women means empowering women to have control over their own lives, including their productive and reproductive roles which have been critical ingredients in Brunei's continuous development in the 21st Century," she said, noting that the Sultanate continuously supports and protects women's rights in the community and the country as a whole.

For instance, legislation for the protection of women and girls is manifested in many Acts and Orders, such as the Compulsory Education 2007, the Employment Order 2009, as well as the Women and Girls Protection Act 1972.

On religious matters, Datin Hajah Adina noted that the rights of women are fully protected with the Islamic Family Order, the Married Women's Act 1999 and other measures in tackling domestic violence.

Women in Brunei have equal access to administration of the country, education, healthcare and business opportunities



Datin Hajah Adina Othman, Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth & Sports, delivering her keynote address during the opening of the ISB Borneo Global Issues Conference IX 2011

Women in Brunei enjoy equal access to administration of the country, education, healthcare and business opportunities, the Deputy Minister reaffirmed.

As the lead agency on women's issues in Brunei, the Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sports strongly supports all efforts towards the empowerment of the 'Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women' (CEDAW) and within the national philosophy of MIB (Malay Islamic Monarchy), she added.

Meanwhile, Ms Moni Pizani, Representative and Regional Programme Director of UN Women, East and Southeast Asia Regional Office, explained that the creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact.

In East and Southeast Asia, UN Women will build on the work that UNIFEM has been doing, particularly in supporting countries in the region to uphold the international norms for gender equality and empowerment.

ROYAL STAND ON EQUALITY



AZROL AZMI

Her Royal Highness Paduka Seri Pengiran Anak Isteri Pengiran Anak Sarah is seen with an ISB student-speaker during the ISB Borneo Global Issues Conference IX at ICC yesterday. Her Royal Highness said Brunei Darussalam provided full access in education and healthcare for youth regardless of gender. HRH was met on arrival by Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports Datin Hjh Adina and ISB Executive Principal Mr David G Taylor MBE.

Full report & photos in pages 4 & 5



ABOVE: HRH Paduka Seri Pengiran Anak Isteri Pengiran Anak Sarah delivering her sabda during the opening ceremony of The ISB Borneo Global Issues Conference IX yesterday

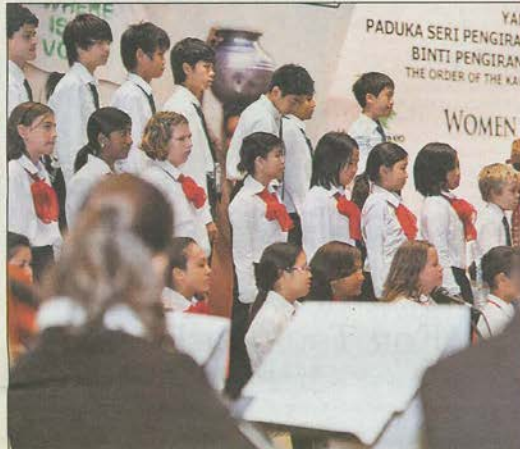


RIGHT: HRH Paduka Seri Pengiran Anak Isteri Pengiran Anak Sarah opens the conference with the strike of the gong

PHOTOS: AZROL AZMI

WOMEN TOP BORNEO GLOBAL ISSUES

By Rokiah Mahmud



ISB Choir group performing at the opening ceremony

Many girls and women today still do not have proper access to basic education, gainful employment and proper healthcare, Her Royal Highness Paduka Seri Pengiran Anak Isteri Pengiran Anak Sarah binti Pengiran Haji Salleh Ab Rahaman stated at the opening ceremony of The ISB Borneo Global Issues Conference IX (ISB BGIC IX) at the International Convention Centre in Berakas yesterday.

Her Royal Highness, the Royal Patron of the conference, was greeted on arrival at the ICC by Datin Hjh Adina binti Othman, the Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports and Mr David G Taylor MBE, the Executive Principal of International School Brunei.

HRH in her sabda said that, here in Brunei Darussalam, regardless of gender, access to all levels of education and healthcare is provided to all of the nation's youth by the Government of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam. Recently the Sultanate has also witnessed the historic appointments of Brunei Darussalam's first woman Attorney General and first woman Deputy Minister, HRH said.

Over 300 local students and some foreign delegates representing Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand are participating in the four-day conference, which this year carries the theme, "Women in the 21st Century".

Among the objectives of ISB BGIC is to encourage mutual understanding and international cooperation

in steering youth on the path towards becoming more responsible and caring global citizens.

Participating students will also be put to the test in terms of their communication skills and their ability to present their arguments and counter-arguments. In addition, the conference also serves as a platform for participants to work in cooperation with each other and make new friends, while at the same time enabling them to set up a regional network of friendship that helps to bring the peoples across the region closer together.

With this year's theme being centered on women's issues, the ultimate goal of the conference is to recognise the centrality of gender equality, women's empowerment and the rights of women to participate in and enjoy economic and social development.

Throughout the conference, participating students will debate various topics in a mock-simulation of UN proceedings in four main debating motions: Socio-Economic Affairs, Human Rights, Politics and the Environment.

At the event, HRH also consented to present tokens of appreciation to various main local sponsors and supporters for their part in helping ensure the smooth running of the conference.

Royal Patron opens ISB BGIC IX



HRH Paduka Seri Pengiran Anak Isteri Pengiran Anak Sarah in a group photo with the panellists, speakers and supporters of the ISB BGIC IX

NEWS | NATIONAL

Support efforts to empower women

Hana Roslan
BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

SUPPORT efforts to develop women's rights and empowerment by educating them to achieve their full potential. Her Royal Highness Paduka Seri Pg Anak Isteri Pg Anak Sarah told a conference yesterday.

In a *sabda* during the opening of International School Brunei (ISB) Ninth Borneo Global Issues, HRH said many girls and women today still do not have access to basic education, gainful employment and proper healthcare.

"Women will realise the ambitious targets for slashing extreme poverty and hunger, maternal and infant mortality, rampant diseases, and lack of access to education and health services," stressed HRH.

With UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon repeatedly calling on the global community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, he also said that women were at most "the very core of our final push", HRH added.

HRH also remarked that Brunei, regardless of gender, had access to all levels of education and healthcare provided by His Majesty's Government.

"Recently we also witnessed the historic appointments of Brunei's first woman Attorney General and first female Deputy Minister (Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports)," she said.



As this year's conference is themed "Women in the 21st Century", HRH said that world leaders who participated in the Millennium Development Goal Summit 2010, has recognised the importance of gender equality, women's empowerment and the rights of women to participate as well as enjoy economic and social development.

"Indeed these rights are among the key deliverables towards the attainment of these goals," said the royal patron of the conference.

This attainment can be seen in

the setting up of UN Women, an entity set up by the UN assembly to champion gender equality and empowerment of women and the appointment of Michelle Bachelet, former president of Chile as the executive director.

HRH also said that she was pleased to see that at this year's conference, there were several young women who had the opportunity to expose their leadership by being elected secretaries-general and committee chairwomen of the conference. Participants were also hoped to treat the conference "as if



(Above) HRH Paduka Seri Pengiran Anak Isteri Pengiran Anak Sarah (L) presenting the souvenir to the event supporter during the launching of the 9th Borneo Global Issues Conference (BGIC) hosted by ISB at main conference hall, ICC. (Left) Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports Datin Hj Adina Othman (L) and Attorney General Paduka Hjh Hayati POKSDSP Hj Mohd Salleh (R) were among the guests. Pictures: BT/Zamri Zainal

they were indeed really debating and negotiating around a table in the UN".

"I believe the process of discussion and debate will provide lessons in communication and public speaking that will evolve into essential life skills that hold them in good stead throughout their future pursuits and careers," she said.

It is hoped that there would be an

establishment of a regional network of friendship and camaraderie that help bring the people in the region closer.

"The cross-section of student representation from across our region enriches the process of discussion and sharing of ideas that is an integral part and will be an important contributor to the success of the event," she said.

The Brunei Times

WOMEN

Overcoming gender barriers in LatAm

GUATEMALA CITY

AMARILIS Chilel, 15, left her hometown of Ixchiguan in northwest Guatemala to work as a domestic in the capital, a common story among rural girls and women in Central America. "I went to school up to fourth grade," she told IPS.

The teenager, who belongs to the Mam community, one of the main Mayan native groups in Guatemala, says her father tried without success to convince her to stay in school. But since she began working eight months ago, she sends him the equivalent of US\$43, exactly half of her monthly wage, to help support her three younger sisters.

Chilel still dreams of becoming a schoolteacher. "Next year I'll go back to school," she says while getting ready to clean the house for the family she works for.

Like her, thousands of Central American women face innumerable economic and social barriers to education and training, which severely limit their job opportunities.

This year, the theme of International Women's Day is considered essential to breaking down the discrimination faced by so many women around the world.

In Guatemala, for example, "At age seven, only 54 per cent of Mayan girls are in school, compared with 71 per cent of Mayan boys and 75 per cent of Ladina (persons of mixed race ancestry) girls," says a 2007 study by the US-based Population Council, a non-governmental organisation that advocates reproductive rights.



Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Alicia Barcena (R) and Chilean former president Michelle Bachelet (L) participate in Brasilia, Brazil during the inauguration of the seventh Regional Conference on the Women from Latin America and Caribbean. Picture: EPA

Not for single women

KARACHI, PAKISTAN

SOBIA Aslam, in her forties and twice divorced, often feels she should get married a third time.

Our society is tuned to a family system. There is no provision for being single," says Aslam, talking to IPS. She stresses that it's a double whammy when you are a single mother. After a certain age, men and women are supposed to be seen as a family with "spouses and at least two kids", Aslam says.

The whole society is geared for that. Everything from meal discounts in fancy restaurants, to airfares advertising "two for the price of one" to cooking shows on various TV channels to advertisements, there is nothing that promotes or celebrates being single.

Aslam, who works in a multinational company, in the southern port city of Karachi, has a teenage daughter and knows what it entails juggling housework, raising a child and working - all single-handedly. Aslam's friends suggest that she remarry. "I have not completely abandoned the idea, but no one recommends or volunteers to marry a divorced woman in her forties!" she says.

To fight the negativity surrounding being single here, apart from being financially strong and having family support, education is the only real armour.

"I would not have been so confident or survived had I not completed my education," Nuzhat Riaz, 46, tells IPS.

She received a good piece of advice from a neighbour after the death of her husband - to arm her-



Pakistani acid burn victims attend a candle-light vigil to vow the end of violence against women, on the eve of the International Women's Day organised by Acid Survivors Foundation. Picture: EPA

self with education if she "wanted to live independently away from the shadow of her father and brothers".

And so she did - she first completed her post-graduate studies and went on to do her master's degree. Later she received a diploma in library science.

"The sudden death of her husband 17 years ago turned Riaz's fairland "topsy-turvy", she says.

"His death brought me back to the real world and all the problems."

The Filipino maid had to be let go as well as the lifestyle of leisure and fun.

From learning to write a cheque, taking care of the household budget, and driving a car, Riaz learnt to become a working woman as a school librarian, in a private school in Karachi.

"But bringing up three kids on my own was the most difficult," Riaz acknowledges.

Most single women here say they are often pitied - though pity is mixed with suspicion.

Feminist fight not over, noting International Women's Day is vital

Lucy Mangan LONDON

WHAT," said my friend when I mentioned to him that International Women's Day was coming up on Tuesday, "do you lot need another women's day lot? Haven't you got everything now?"

He is a close friend of a man who once told me he "couldn't work out what a nice girl like you is doing not being a Christian", so I wasn't as surprised at his response as I might have been if, say, it had come from someone normal.

In fact, I was able to summon a few recent examples to testify as to why we might not consider the feminist fight over quite yet.

1. Watching a 15-year-old girl lower her head, pull her hair around her face and blush crimson as a group of older men sitting on a wall leered and shouted at her as she went past. "Here darling, do you always look this beautiful?" was the relatively kindly opener. When she didn't

respond, things rapidly degenerated past the printable stage.

Still, I comforted myself with the thought that it won't have been her first, and certainly won't be her last, experience of this. She'll toughen up soon enough! Internalise and normalise it, girlfriend and life will be a lot easier from then on, okay?

2. Silvio Berlusconi.

3. The increasing number of male friends who think it's OK to send me web links to "funny" things they have found on adult sites.

I would prefer to pretend, at least to myself, at least in so far as it concerns my friends, that there is still some sense of shame attached to the seeking-and-viewing experience (or, if shame is already too much to hope for, then discretion, decorum or some vague intimation, before they press send).

4. Jeremy Clarkson's recent joke on Top Gear about Katie Price's "pink box" (she owns a pink horse box). Tired, is what I

am. Tired.

5. Watching a man on the train pinch his worried-looking wife's cheek to cheer her up. And then, when she didn't respond, pinch it again, harder. And again, harder still, until she finally raised her head and gave a rictus smile.

I caught the eye of another woman who had witnessed the silent scene and I think we must have gone as white as each other.

There was nothing we could do or say, in the middle of a crowded carriage, that would have made any difference and so we stood there, effectively complicit, as who knows how many more people have been before and since, in his miserable, awful game.

That's before we look further abroad, or at wider issues, and start amassing statistics about pay gaps, pregnancy mortality rates in poorer countries, rape convictions everywhere and all the rest. That's why holding International Women's Day in 2011 is neither absurd nor otiose.

Observer

Shining light on women's rights

Andrea Lunt UNITED NATIONS

HOW does a woman challenge deeply entrenched cultural practices to convince her husband, her brother or father that she can demand equal rights?

This is the question facing many women across Africa today, especially in rural areas where high levels of illiteracy have kept many girls and their mothers "in the dark" when it comes to civil liberties.

It might sound like an uphill battle, but African activists at this week's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York are proving that defying, and even transforming, the status quo can be done.

"We are giving women the dignity to claim their rights and those of their children and relatives," Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) representative Bernice Sam told a forum at this week's CSW. "And we're working with different religions; Muslims and Christians alike."

Since 2009, WILDAF has spearheaded a campaign that is

working with women across Africa, with particular focus on peasant farmers in five countries - Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

The programme involves training Legal Literacy Volunteers (LLVs), who go on to spread the word about democratic and human rights, through public seminars, illustrated brochures, and radio and TV initiatives.

More than 8,000 women have benefited from the public awareness campaign so far, using their newfound knowledge to fight domestic violence, assert property rights, and even contest candidacy in local elections.

The success of WILDAF's approach is that they not only target women, but also involve local men, police, government leaders, judges, traditional leaders, teachers, civil society and even the military, in their training and mediation.

To date, WILDAF has trained more than 250 LLVs and these volunteer paralegals have gone on to create village committees in which both men and women work together to fight against the violation of human rights.